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The Sandwiched Generation: Are You Feeling the Squeeze?

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More and more people are living well into their 80s and 90s. And because people are having children later in life, increasingly adults find themselves with young children and elderly parents—both needing their care and attention. Welcome to the sandwiched generation.

Who are you?

If you are a member of the sandwich generation, chances are your roles are changing rapidly. Your role as child to your parent may be shifting—as your parents need more care, you take on the role of parent to your parent. It can be a confusing time. You may want to be Mom or Dad only to your children, but this may not be the case.

Pulled from both sides

When all those around you need you, what can you do for you? Keeping your head when the demands are high is a skill, not an instinct. When an older family member needs considerable help, you probably need some help, too.

Watch out for guilt

Many parent/child caregivers feel guilt going both ways. Did I spend enough time with Johnny today? Why did I have to shout at mother today? Because you have so many demands, you may occasionally be ashamed of your behavior. Be realistic about what you can, and, cannot do, and acknowledge your feelings to your spouse or adult family members. Children, too, are always receptive to an apology.

Change what you can and accept the rest

The feeling that they have to make everything right often plagues members of the sandwich generation. Learn to let go of things that can't be changed. Particularly when it comes to dealing with an ill or dying family member, you may not be able to provide all the solutions.

Call a family meeting

Bring your immediate family—your spouse and children—together. Allow each person to express her feelings and concerns. Work together to create a list of responsibilities regarding your parent's care. Then let each member offer to help with particular tasks. Outline the routine, and try to stick to it. Posting a schedule also helps make sure the bases are covered at all times.

Make a list

Jot down the names of professionals and other people who can help if there is a problem. Such persons may include doctors, lawyers, bankers, clergymen, friends or neighbors.

Discuss long-term care options

Talk with other family members now about the options, including nursing homes or assisted living facilities. Educating yourself in advance can save you a lot of stress and help you make better decisions in the event of a crisis.

Be honest with your children

Even small children can understand when you tell them what is happening to your parent, and how you feel about it. If your parent is dying, openness will help prevent any confusion or fear your children might have.

Listen

Your children likely will have fears, concerns, frustrations and desires. Listen as best you can, no matter how small or insignificant their issues may seem.

Get enough rest and regular exercise

Take care of yourself. Eat well, too. Staying healthy will help you do your very best when the sandwich generation squeeze hits.

Sources:

National Family Caregivers Association

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